

# CALIFORNIA ENERGY COMMISSION

REPORT OF CONVERSATION

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## DOCKET

11-AFC-2

DATE OCT 26 2011

RECD. DEC 14 2011



**Siting, Transportation, and  
Environmental Protection Division**

FILE: 11-AFC-2

PROJECT TITLE: Hidden Hills SEGS

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Email	<input type="checkbox"/> Meeting Location:	
NAME: Amy Golden	DATE: 10/26/11	TIME: 2:18pm
WITH: Heather Beeler, Eagle Permit Specialist, US Fish and Wildlife Service		
SUBJECT: Hidden Hills Solar Electric Generating System, 11-AFC-2 – Golden Eagle/Migratory Bird surveys		

Hi Amy,

This solar project employs the new "Power Tower" technology, for which the potential impact to wildlife is poorly understood, particularly concerning the limits for the cone of super-heated air. As you know there is potential for direct take by the power towers and indirect take from disturbance and loss of foraging habitat. Eagles and raptors maybe attracted to the towers themselves as potential perches.

The work order as drafted places heavy emphasis on breeding season eagle surveys. While evaluating the density and proximity of the local eagle population is certainly important, what we really need to do is evaluate the projects risk to eagles. Determining how or if eagles forage within the project vicinity throughout the year is equally important. I recommend "hawk watch migration" style eagle observation points be set up and surveys be conducted throughout the year, unless your local experts can definitively inform you eagles don't winter in the project area. I'll think about recommending a time length for these surveys. Other projects observation periods vary between 1.5 hrs to 8 hrs per point conducted biweekly or weekly respectively.

Talk to you tomorrow.  
Heather

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Heather Beeler  
Eagle Permit Specialist  
US Fish and Wildlife Service  
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Sacramento, CA 95825  
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10/26/2011 12:30 PM

From: Amy Golden <AGolden@energy.state.ca.us>  
To: [Heather Beeler@fws.gov](mailto:Heather.Beeler@fws.gov)  
CC: Carol Watson <CWatson@energy.state.ca.us>, Rick York [Ryork@energy.state.ca.us](mailto:Ryork@energy.state.ca.us)  
Re: Hidden Hills - draft Golden eagle data request

Hi Heather,

# CALIFORNIA ENERGY COMMISSION



## REPORT OF CONVERSATION

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Attached is a draft of the GOEA data request that we have been working on for Hidden Hills and that we would like to review with you and others during tomorrow's agency meeting. Just wanted to pass it along to you in case you have a chance to review it ahead of time.

Thanks and talk to you tomorrow,

Amy Golden  
Staff Biologist  
California Energy Commission  
Siting, Transmission, and Environmental Protection Division  
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Sacramento CA 95814  
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### Technical Area: Biological Resources

Author: Amy Golden, Carol Watson

### GOLDEN EAGLE

**BACKGROUND:** Due to recent changes in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) survey protocols and management of golden eagle, staff needs additional information on the occurrence of golden eagle nests within the project area. The applicant's golden eagle surveys provided in Appendix 5.2D of the AFC did not completely follow the most recent survey protocol for this species, *Interim Golden Eagle Inventory and Monitoring Protocols and other Recommendations* (Pagel et al 2010). Staff contacted USFWS Migratory Bird Program staff on September 6, 2011 (Heather Beeler) and learned that helicopter surveys were highly recommended for this project and if there were conflicts with bighorn sheep lambing season, helicopter surveys could be flown prior to the lambing season to ensure all potential eagle nests are located. Staff also learned that upon completion of the survey, ground surveys could be conducted for the identified nest locations. Heather Beeler also indicated the applicant's golden eagle surveys included in Appendix 5.2D suffice as a preliminary, reconnaissance-level survey effort but are not thorough enough to draw any conclusions about eagle use of the project area during the breeding season or throughout the year. At staff's request, the applicant contacted Heather Beeler on September 7, 2011 to clarify aerial and ground survey needs and appropriate survey timing for golden eagles for this project. Heather Beeler has also indicated that observational points are suggested for golden eagle migration data in which observers watch for golden eagle activity from fixed locations for a minimum of two hours to assess occurrence and habitat use of golden eagle in the project area.

Based on consultation with resource agencies, previous Energy Commission siting cases for large solar thermal projects in the Mojave Desert have considered a cumulative impact radius of 140 miles from the project site to golden eagle territories, since the local golden eagle population is defined as eagles that occur within the average natal dispersal distance of the nests under consideration (Pagel et al 2010).

The following data requests are based on the preliminary agency conversations and guidance included in Records of Conversations provided by the applicant during Data Adequacy review (California Department Fish and Game (CDFG), Jeff Villepique; Sacramento USFWS, Heather Beeler; Ventura USFWS Ashleigh Blackford; Nevada Department of Wildlife, Brad Hardenbrook)).



## DATA REQUESTS

1. Please provide staff and the resource agencies a draft Golden Eagle Study proposal that identifies the appropriate month(s) to conduct helicopter surveys for golden eagles during fall 2011 or winter 2012 so the surveys do not conflict with the start of Nelson's bighorn sheep (BHS) lambing season in the Nopah Range, Kingston Range, and surrounding ranges. Please also identify the appropriate time to conduct follow-up ground surveys of all potential golden eagle nests identified during the helicopter surveys based on breeding and non-breeding seasons for golden eagle and breeding season of BHS. Please also include in the study proposal at least one fixed observational point to assess golden eagle habitat use of the site.

Please also include a list and the resumes and qualifications of surveyors/observers proposed to conduct these surveys. The surveyors/observers must meet the qualifications specified in Pagel et al 2010, see Observer Qualifications. Please provide the information to staff for review, with copies to USFWS.

2. Once the agencies have approved the study proposal and the fall 2011 helicopter survey(s) has been completed, please provide staff a summary report that will include the "minimum data collected at known golden eagle territories" identified in Pagel et al 2010 (See Section IX, Documentation and Accepted Notation). Once winter/spring 2012 ground surveys have been completed, please provide staff a complete Golden Eagle Study Report.
3. Pagel et al 2010 states that "prior to initiating inventory efforts, project proponents should first assess all existing and historical data available on eagles contained by and within 4 to 10+ miles of the areas slated for development...." Please provide staff the results of a literature review search (museum records, consultation with resource agencies, local birding experts and organizations) of golden eagle nest territories (both historic and active) that may occur in the project area.

**CC:** Dick Ratliff, Staff Counsel  
Mike Monasmith, Project Manager  
Rick York, Senior Biologist  
Eric Knight, Environmental Office Manager  
Chris Davis, Siting Office Manager  
Lynn Sadler, Assoc. Public Adviser

**Prepared by:** Carol Watson, Staff Biologist